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Guest commentary

President Clinton deserves support

By GRASON ECKEL

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I'm proud to be a Democrat. We need to send Democrats to Congress and President Bill Clinton deserves to be supported and re-elected. He is the first president in the last 30 years to achieve job growth and low inflation. The "misery index" (inflation plus unemployment) is currently below nine; under Bush it was above 11.

The key to this accomplishment is President Clinton's budget plan. Republican's like Phil Gramm were the loudest critics, predicting that "hundreds of thousands of Americans will lose their jobs because of the Clinton bill." Phil Gramm was wrong. President Clinton has succeeded in bringing down long-term interest rates and encouraging business investment that has stimulated job growth. Already, the economy has produced nearly six million jobs — five million more than it did during Bush's presidency. The unemployment rate, which was 7.6 percent when President Clinton took office, has dropped.

President Clinton has risked his presidency on the passage of economic and social programs and has fought like a tiger for his victories. To pass the North American Free Trade Agreement, President Clinton threw himself into the fight — meeting members of Congress one-on-one, making phone calls, giving speeches, etc. He brought the same energy and conviction to pass the Global Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. President Clinton was willing to alienate labor unions that are among the Democratic Party's strongest constituents because he believed that these trade treaties would create jobs. Regardless of how one feels about NAFTA and GATT, one must respect the fact that President Clinton showed courage and took risks to have them passed.

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President Clinton's schools-to-work program has created a network of apprenticeship programs to give students hands-on job skills that can't be learned from reading books. These students work with electricians, plumbers and carpenters. When the program reaches full implementation, one-half million students will be enrolled. That's one-half million more skilled workers for America every year than before the program.

While Republicans seek to cut the AmeriCorp program, at least 20,000 volunteers are in communities helping kids, restoring national parks, and counseling troubled teenagers. For their 10 to 12 month service, AmeriCorps volunteers earn vouchers worth $5,000 toward tuition or for paying off student loans.

Even President Clinton's toughest critics must admit that he is committed to economic fairness. And that commitment has led him to push through a program that gave significant help to the millions of working poor of this country who are struggling to work their way out of poverty. The Earned Income Tax Credit guarantees that any person working 40 hours a week, even at minimum wage, will not fall below the poverty line. Whereas earlier a mother of two may have received more money by staying on welfare and other aid programs, the EITC helps make work more profitable.

To pay for his deficit-reduction plan and the EITC, President Clinton raised taxes on the very wealthy, who have benefited most from America's tax laws.

And let's not forget about the president's efforts to fight crime. The Clinton crime fighting package put approximately 20,000 more police officers on the streets and the $8.8 billion that President Clinton's bill allocated prisons will help ensure that violent criminals are not put back on the streets due to overcrowding. The president fought for passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act, which ensures that family members who take time off from work to care for a newborn baby or a relative suffering from an illness will have their jobs waiting for them when they return.

One of the most important missions of any president is his appointments to the Supreme Court. Justices Stephen Breyer and Ruth Ginsburg breezed through Senate confirmation with bipartisan support both on Capital Hill and within the legal community. These are two pragmatic, intelligent, and moderate justices, unlike Republican nominees Bork and Thomas.

It has been under President Clinton's leadership that the government has finally made an effort to make reparations to the victims of nuclear testing.

Meanwhile, President Clinton's foreign policy, though ridiculed by Republicans, has been, on the whole, successful. With President Clinton's leadership Israel has signed peace agreements with the PLO and Jordan; Haiti has a democratically elected president; and there is a cease-fire in Northern Ireland. The Ukraine is an independent state from the former U.S.S.R. It has an unstable government. After the breakup of the U.S.S.R. it found itself in possession of the world's third-largest nuclear arsenal. President Clinton, Gore and Secretary of State Christopher presurred the Ukraine to abandon its plan of becoming a nuclear power. Under constant White House pressure, the Ukraine agreed last November to dismantle its 1,800 nuclear warheads. Two other former Soviet republics, Kazakhstan and Belarus, followed suit. Do we hear Rush Limbaugh tell us about this?

Has President Clinton made mistakes? Sure he has. Are they as bad as Watergate or the Iran-Contra scandal? I don't think so. Let the Clinton-bashers keep attacking — negative politics never works.

President Clinton is a humanitarian and he has been a good and effective president. He deserves our support and prayers.

Grason Eckel writes on personal opinions and experiences from his home in Cambridge.